

**Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program  
Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control,  
River and Coastal Protection Act of 2006 (Proposition 84)**

**Subregion:** SOUTH **County:** TULARE

**Applicant:** TULE RIVER INDIAN RESERVATION

**Project Title:** TULE RIVER WATERSHED RESTORATION PROJECT

**Reference Number:** SNC 070291

**PROJECT SCOPE**

The project will restore ten miles of riparian corridor along four creeks, and five acres of adjacent wetland and meadow in the Tule River watershed near Bear, Rocky, and Kessing Creeks. This project has matching funds and in-kind services totaling \$22,000 from the Tule River Tribe.

The restoration project includes:

- Recruitment and hiring of seasonal staff, purchasing supplies and renting equipment;
- Assessment of damage to specific sites;
- Clean-up of marijuana cultivation waste materials located along riparian areas;
- Removal of access trails, leading to the marijuana cultivation areas, and illegal campsites;
- Installing temporary protective fencing around highly environmentally sensitive areas;
- Enhancing riparian and meadow areas with native plant revegetation;
- Testing water quality of tribe's primary water source and surveying revegetated sites;
- Establish photo-points at the project sites and maintain a record of before and after project photos;
- Provide progress reports to the Conservancy every six months for the project duration, and a final performance report on the project once completed.

This project will augment watershed and streambed improvements implemented by the Tribal Environmental Protection Agency Program.

**PROJECT SCHEDULE**

<b>DETAILED PROJECT DELIVERABLES</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>
Establish photo-points at project site and take pre-restoration photos	April 2008 – May 2008
Recruit and hire staff, purchase supplies, rent equipment, conduct site assessments	April 2008 – July 2008
Clean-up waste materials, remove illegal campsites and access trails, install temporary fencing along highly sensitive areas	July 2008- September 2008
Complete and submit six-month progress report to SNC	October 2008
Revegetate riparian areas and wetland meadow	October 2008 – January 2009
Conduct water quality assessments and revegetated site assessments	January 2009 – March 2009
Complete and submit twelve-month progress report to SNC	April 2009
Complete water quality assessments and revegetate site assessments	May 2009 – August 2009
Take post-restoration photographs for inclusion in the final report	September 2009
<b>Final Report/Final Payment Request</b>	<b>October, 2009</b>

## PROJECT COSTS

PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES	TOTAL SNC FUNDING
Ten seasonal staff stipends	\$15,000
Contract for water testing, surveillance, crew supervisor	40,000
Supplies (field tools, protective gear, GPS unit, fuel)	15,500
Equipment rental (ATV & trailer)	15,000
Administrative fee	8,276
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$93,776</b>

### Letters of Support:

- Yosemite Sequoia Resource Conservation and Development Council
- Porterville Chamber of Commerce

### Recommendation:

Staff recommends the authorization of this grant for the requested \$93,776.

## **Tule River Watershed Restoration Project**

### **2. Project Summary**

The Tule River Watershed Restoration Project, initiated by the Tule River Tribal Council in partnership with the tribe's environmental program, Tribal Dept of Public Safety, the Tulare County Sheriffs Dept., the Tule River Natural Resources Program, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, proposes to restore approximately 5 acres of riparian watershed and wetland areas and approximately 10 miles of waterways, which comprise the greater Tule River watershed of the Tule River Indian Reservation. The property is located within the Tule River Indian Reservation and is managed by the Tule River Tribal Council since its inception in 1873. The Reservation consists of approximately 56,000 acres.

Since 2003, the Sequoia National Forest has seen a major increase in marijuana plantations run by Mexican traffickers. As a result of investigative efforts involving the Tulare and Kern County Sheriffs Department, and the U.S. Forest Service, numerous arrests have been made, including mid to upper level Cartel members. In November, 2004, Gerardo Arreola, Florin Arreola Avalos, and Hilario Villasenor, three upper level members of a major drug organization, were convicted and sentenced to prison terms for their involvement in cultivation on the Greenhorn Ranger District.

In 2004, there 153,889 plants removed from the Sequoia National Forest, making the SNF "number one" in the nation for marijuana cultivation.

To date, approximately \$60 million dollars of large marijuana cultivation operations, consisting of growing materials, plants have been discovered and shut down by the Tulare County Sheriffs Department; furthermore, there is documented evidence that major methamphetamine production operations exist in clandestine locations on the Tule River Indian Reservation. The discovery, eradication and convictions of persons responsible for developing large marijuana operations on the Reservation have been positive. However, following the eradication of the marijuana plants, and subsequent arrests, several tons of trash associated with marijuana cultivation in remote areas of the Reservation, are left unmitigated. Materials that have been abandoned include: pesticides, fertilizers, plastic, irrigation pipe, opened and unopened cans of food, and camping gear. These items, when left behind, impose a serious threat to water quality in forest creeks, which flow downstream into the larger river. In addition, irrigation pipe, if left unattended remains to be used by illegal growers who return the next year to engage in illegal growing activities.

The project is a collaborative effort utilizing professional staff from the tribe's Natural Resources Program, Environmental Program, applicable US Forest Service personnel (may include biologists, archeologists, Hot Shot Crews) and law enforcement staff.

This project also complements the tribal EPA and Natural Resources programs, which function to safeguard watershed and forested areas through best-management principles by implementing restoration activities aimed at specific problem areas. Finally, this



project will enhance recreation activities of these areas due to the presence of illegal trespassers.

**Restoration activities include:**

(1) Assessments of damage to specific site(s); (2) Photo documentation, including GPS/GIS map layering of specific materials, chemicals left at site(s); (3) Removal and transfer of materials away from the site(s); (4) Water quality and soil testing of waters and soils affected by the abandoned waste materials; (5) Revegetation of marijuana-operations impacts in the meadows and wetlands with native plant species; and (6) Removal of access trails leading to these areas;

The Tule River Watershed Restoration Project total cost is \$115,776. The Tribe has contributed \$22,000 through in-kind services through EPA, BIA and NRCS.

**Authorization to Apply or Resolution (Reference to attached)**

**A. Land and Water Benefits**

The Tule River Tribe is currently planning a comprehensive water supply enhancement project on the Reservation to solve current water supply deficiencies and to provide water for future development. The tribe's existing water supply relies on various springs within the Tule River watershed. Various investigations of the tribe's water resources have been performed and as a result the South Fork of the Tule River and its tributaries have been identified as the most likely source of water for existing and future development on the Reservation. These existing and future needs include domestic use, commercial enterprises, tribal administration buildings, health center, and irrigation.

The tribe has an immediate and ongoing need to develop additional water supplies for the reservation. After exploring the nature and extent of both its surface and ground water resources, the Tribe has identified the South Fork of the Tule River and its tributaries as the best source of available water and the Tribe has decided to develop this resource.

Prior to developing this water resource, the Tribe has undertaken measures, largely through its EPA program, to monitor all surface and ground water for water quality. Now, with the advent of unexpected illegal marijuana cultivation in the high mountain areas of the Reservation, and the impact on the watershed areas and subsequent surface water, the tribe is moving forward to mitigate affected watershed areas through clean up and restoration.

The proposed project will significantly augment watershed and streambed improvements undertaken by the tribal EPA program and the Natural Resources Program within the watershed. The overall result of the project will be approximately 10.miles of Pigeon Creek, Rocky Creek, Kessing Creek, and Bear Creek, respectively, being restored to historic beneficial uses.

During restoration, "best management practices" will be followed regarding the elimination of abandoned waste materials and chemicals and mitigation of adverse